



Communist University Introductions

These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.

Philosophy and Religion, Part 0



Philosophy and Religion, Introduction

The series that will begin in two weeks' time on this YCLSA Discussion Forum attempts to show how it is finally on the battlefield of Philosophy that the struggle for freedom is won or lost.

It shows that this battlefield is a Freirean battlefield. It is the crucial battle of the free-willing human Subject, otherwise known as “The Subject of History”.

.

Our course attempts to show that some of the philosophical touchstones or “shibboleths” of the communist movement have been terribly mistaken. It shows that the opposition of idealism to materialism, where the latter is supposed to eliminate the former, is not dialectical.

What is dialectical is the counterposition of the human with the material world. These two can never be collapsed into one, so long as human life continues. One does not eliminate the other. Each is a condition of the other. Hence this is a true dialectic: a unity and struggle of opposites.

In retrospect it seems clear that at the time of the Great October Revolution in 1917 in Russia there was a philosophical deficit among the revolutionaries; and that this philosophical deficit got worse as time went on; and that this weakness eventually undermined the revolution and caused it to topple, in the “collapse of the Soviet Union” from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

We will succeed or fail in the future, in proportion to our grasp of philosophy.

Philosophy is a beautiful study, and nothing to fear.

Illustration: “Question Everything!” – the sometime logo of the Communist University of London

- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).
-



[Oscar Wilde, 1854-1900](#)

Soul of Socialism

In the Progress Publishers (Moscow) Dictionary of Philosophy (1984 English edition) the Fundamental Question of Philosophy is defined as: *“the question of the relationship of consciousness to being, of thought to matter and nature, examined on two planes, first, what is primary – spirit or nature, matter or consciousness – and second, how is knowledge of the world related to the world itself, or to put it differently, does consciousness correspond to being, is it capable of truthfully reflecting the world?”*

The Communist University takes this to mean the relationship of Subject to Object, (or in other words, of mind to matter) of which the Subject – meaning ourselves, Humanity – is our primary concern and source of value, and is therefore our source of morality.

We take it from [Christopher Caudwell](#) that freedom is the good that contains all good, and we take it from Marx and Engels in the [Communist Manifesto](#) that the free development of each is the precondition for the free development of all. We will contrast this view with the contradictory view, which is that matter can be held as primary, and that human consciousness can be treated as derivative of the material that contains it.

The principal dialectic of this set will proceed in this way, without dogma and without closure.

Socialism's Soul

Oscar Wilde [an image of him is above], perhaps with assistance from the Communist Manifesto, saw that only from the free development of each could come the free development of all, and that the purpose of Socialism is therefore, as he put it, Individualism. Oscar Wilde's "[The Soul of Man Under Socialism](#)" (MS-Word format download linked below) is a very good text to discuss, if people are ready for discussion. It is not necessary to read the whole sixteen pages, but it is very rewarding to do so. Here are a few lines:

"The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.

"In its development it will be assisted by Christianity, if men desire that; but if men do not desire that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one.

"'Know thyself' was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, 'Be thyself' shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply 'Be thyself.' That is the secret of Christ.

"When Jesus talks about the poor he simply means personalities, just as when he talks about the rich he simply means people who have not developed their personalities."

This is altogether a wonderful piece of writing, full of wit, charm and surprising truth. It represents much of what the Communist University aspires towards. May it please you to persevere with it.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Soul of Man under Socialism, 1891, Wilde](#).



Soul of Soulless Conditions

37 years before Oscar Wilde wrote the “Soul of Man Under Socialism”, Karl Marx wrote his “[Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#)”. Marx expressed similar impatience with the Germans as Wilde did with the English, and with similar brilliance.

Even though he writes of the end of religion, yet Marx, with words that have forever since that time been famous, expressed his tender understanding of “the heart of a heartless world”. Those who only quote the part about the “opium of the people” miss this point. One who called religion “the sigh of the oppressed creature” could not have had contempt for religion, or for religious people.

Marx was 25 years old. He was the former editor of a distinguished (and then banned) magazine, and a Doctor of Philosophy. For religion he had an appropriate, sympathetic and poetic respect. Marx did not make war on religion, but he was certainly proposing to storm the heights of philosophy. (For a version of the body of the work itself, as opposed to its Introduction attached and linked below, see [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#) on MIA).

The linked text is the confident Introduction to an ambitious work that was never published in Marx’s lifetime. He was proposing to issue a critique of the “Philosophy of Right”, the most accessible of Hegel’s works; works which still had prestige. The great philosopher had died thirteen years previously.

Neither Marx nor Engels wrote very much at all about religion in their subsequent four and five decades of life. This Introduction is the most substantial of Marx’s writings on religion, insofar as it is about religion. But it is also about philosophy, and about class politics. Marx’s first sentence claims criticism of religion as the prerequisite of all other criticism. He seldom leaned upon this point again.

Marx is concerned to establish, not the condition of religion, but the condition of life once the illusions of religion have left the minds of the living. Towards the end of the Introduction comes this question and answer:

“Where, then, is the positive possibility of a German emancipation?”

“Answer: In the formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no historical, but only human, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat.”

This 1843 (written) statement is categorical evidence of Marx’s commitment already at that time to the historical role of the working class. This was before Marx had teamed up with Engels. The team-up only happened later in 1844 (September), in Paris, France, although they had met briefly in Cologne, Germany, in November 1842.

What it also shows is Marx’s conception of the arrival of the working class as the determining event going into the future; and this has implications, if true, for South Africa in 2013. The determining factor in South Africa’s development will be the growth of the South African working class, both objectively and in terms of its subjective self-consciousness as a class.

Says Marx, nearly at the end of the Introduction:

“Philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy.”

This is the theme of our course. In terms of its capacity to fulfil its historic role, or not, philosophy will be the proletariat’s essential tool or weapon.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Intro, 1844, Marx.](#)



[Leon Battista Alberti, 1404 - 1472](#)

The Point is to Change the World

Any one of the eleven short [Theses on Feuerbach](#) (download linked below) would be adequate on its own as a topic for discussion in a study circle. The most famous of them is the last, and justifiably so:

"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

This shows Marx in 1845 as being firmly in the camp of those humanists for whom the active, free-willing Subject is the centre and the starting point of all philosophy and all politics. It puts Marx in the opposite camp from those "materialists" who regard the human as derivative of and secondary to the purely physical. Marx never shifted from this strong and logical position. Marx poses the Subject in a dialectical relation with the Objective universe, but the Subject is the one with the initiative. The Subject makes things happen.

This is different from the idealism that ignores the material world, and it is equally different from the materialism that prioritises the mechanical over the mental.

Ludwig Feuerbach's intervention into the philosophical debates of the early 1840s, with his book "The Essence of Christianity", created a sensation in the intellectual crucible that included Marx and Engels as well as the "Young Hegelians" with whom Marx and Engels were falling out at the time.

Reading the eleven "Theses" reveals that Marx immediately recognised Feuerbach as a materialist, but rejected Feuerbach's brand of anti-religious materialism at once.

Thesis number two says that truth is a practical question. This is something that is repeated later on in the "classics" of Marxism. This, too, reinforces the assertion that the world or universe is a human world or universe. *"It is men who change circumstances"* says Marx in the third Thesis, and *"human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice."*

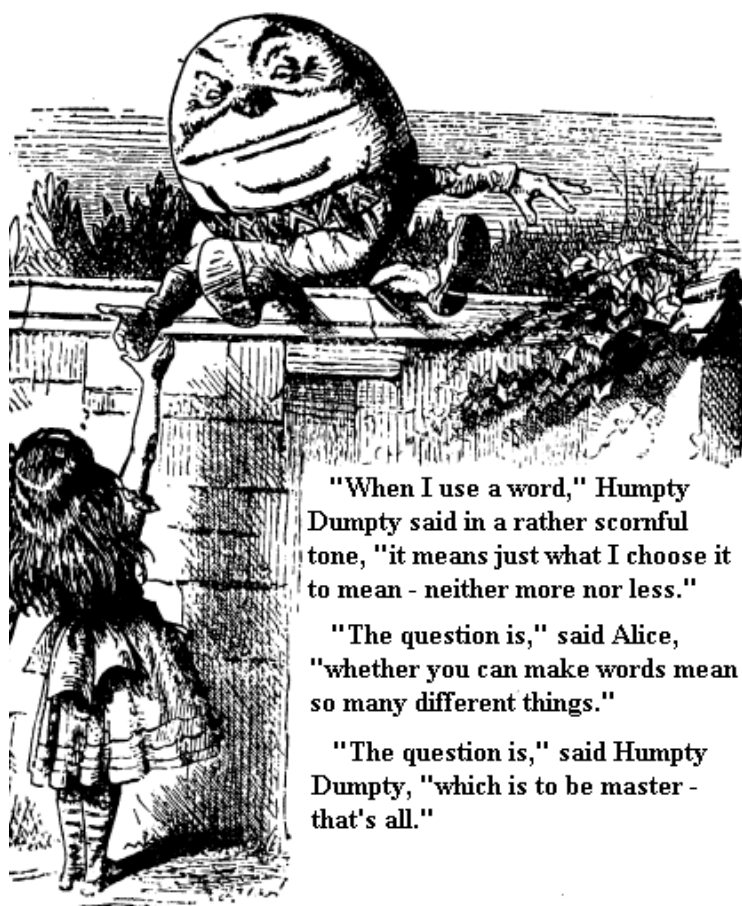
The subsequent Theses develop this understanding through to Thesis 10 which says: *"The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity."*

This is a good reminder that for Marx in particular, the term "civil society" only means "bourgeois society", and that therefore for Marxists, "civil society" is something to be overcome and transcended, and not something to be put on a pedestal and worshipped.

The image represents Leon Battista Alberti, the greatest of the renowned rational humanists of the Italian Renaissance. They upheld the idea of the *"uomo universale"* (universal man), and gained the confidence to surpass the achievements of the ancient world after a thousand years of backward feudalism in Western Europe.

The humanists of today are the Marxists.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Theses on Feuerbach, 1845, Marx.](#)
-



Which is master, mind or matter?

According to the Progress Publishers, Moscow, Dictionary of Philosophy, 1984 edition, the Fundamental Question of Philosophy is:

"...the question of the relationship of consciousness to being, of thought to matter and nature, examined on two planes, first, what is primary – spirit or nature, matter or consciousness – and second, how is knowledge of the world related to the world itself or, to put it differently, does consciousness correspond to being, is it capable of truthfully reflecting the world?"

According to the well-known series of articles by "Dialego" (John Hoffman) called "Philosophy and Class Struggle": *"Materialism Vs. Idealism [is] the Basic Question of Philosophy"*. We will look at Dialego in more detail later in this series.

The Soviet dictionary proposes a unity-and-struggle-of-opposites as between human Subject and Objective nature. Dialego, on the other hand, proposes a dialectic between Materialism and Idealism.

So which is it? Which one of these two is correct?

Dialectical logic insists that its struggling opposites are interdependent. They define each other, and cannot escape each other, except through the working out of their struggle. In just this way, the Subject defines the Object, while at the same time the Object is the necessary condition for the Subject.

But Idealism and Materialism are two mutually-exclusive philosophical systems. They do not depend upon one another. If one prevails, the other one is annihilated. This is not dialectical. This is only a “zero-sum game”.

Says Dialego: *“...materialism contends that people's ideas, like all other aspects of their behaviour, are the product of material causes and can only be properly understood when these causes are discovered.”* This is also the position of other philosophies, such as Post-Modernism, and Social Darwinism, both of which hold that human free will is an illusion.

Says the dictionary: *“The philosophers who form the camp of materialism regard matter, being, as being primary, and consciousness as secondary, and hold that consciousness is the result of influence exerted on it by the objectively existing external world.”*

This “materialist” view has been orthodoxy among many communists since the 1920s. Among others who expounded it, and who consequently promoted Dialectical Materialism were Joseph Stalin and [Maurice Cornforth](#) (1909 – 1980), a British theoretician. Among those with a different view have been the late [Cyril Smith](#), and Paolo Freire.

In this ten-part course we are going to test the question of Dialectical Materialism by interrogating the work of these and other thinkers.

The linked download, below, is relatively difficult to read. It is given for the sake of the first few of its pages, and to show that although Marx and Engels in their early writing did raise up the question of Idealism and Materialism, in a chapter title, yet it is by no means clear from this that they had any intentions to give birth to anything like Dialectical Materialism.

Although their work is saturated with philosophy, and particularly with Hegelian philosophy, yet the amount of writing that Marx and Engels did that was directly about philosophy was quite little. Much of it was in their early days such as the period prior to the writing of the linked Part 1A of [“The German Ideology”](#), where they recall that:

"Principles ousted one another, heroes of the mind overthrew each other with unheard-of rapidity, and in the three years 1842-45 more of the past was swept away in Germany than at other times in three centuries."

The whole work was to be a *"Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets"*. These were the Young Hegelians, personally well known to the young Marx and Engels. The writing was polemical.

Does Marx support or advance in any way the reduction of all humanity and human history to non-human, molecular, chemical or nuclear sources? One view is that Marx is merely saying that the human Subject is only comprehensible within a material, Objective world. Or in other words, that the relationship of mind and matter is just that: a relationship. A dialectical relationship.

"The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals."

We will return to these questions.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Idealism and Materialism, 1845, Marx.](#)
-



[G W F Hegel, 1770 - 1831](#)

One World, One History

This series on “Philosophy, Religion, and Revolution” is intentionally Marxist. In that regard, like everyone else, we must rely upon the works of the 1840s for philosophy, most especially the 1844 “[Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right](#)”, the 1845 “[Theses on Feuerbach](#)”, and the 1845/46 “[The German Ideology](#)” - although none of these were published in Marx’s lifetime.

The next group of original Marxist works that explicitly address philosophical questions are from the pen of Frederick Engels, during the time when he wrote and published the book known as “[Anti-Dühring](#)”, which came out in 1877. One of the spin-offs of “Anti-Dühring” is the main article, “[On Dialectics](#)”, linked below, written as a preface. The publication of the book was followed by another spin-off, called “[Socialism, Utopian and Scientific](#)”. In the 1880s, Engels wrote about philosophy again, in his book “[Ludwig Feuerbach](#)”.

Among other things, we are going to be pursuing the idea that philosophy is indispensable to politics, as well as to science, and that weakness in philosophy will have, and in the past did have, disastrous effects upon political work.

Engels' "Anti-Dühring" is the work that contains the notorious "tools of analysis" that encourage the illusion that people can have a simple set of keys to the kingdom of knowledge. This course will leave those "tools" aside, deliberately; but we are obliged to spend some time with the book in general, because it has been so influential.

The book is an argument against a person who was otherwise of quite little consequence in political history. Engels spends a tedious amount of time explaining Dühring's errors before he allows himself to express a fully-elaborated alternative world-outlook as compared to Dühring's. In this way, "Anti-Dühring" became a compendium of alternative, Marxist, thought.

Thus, Engels spends the first page of this preface with Dühring, before breaking away with the remark that "theoretical thought is a historical product". Then he begins to expound dialectics, investigated, as he says, prior to his and Marx's work, only by [Hegel](#) [Image, above] and by the Ancient Greek philosopher, [Aristotle](#). Dialectics *"alone offers the analogue for, and thereby the method of explaining, the evolutionary processes occurring in nature, inter-connections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another,"* says Engels.

Engels goes further, pointing out that, then as now:

"All that was saved from the remnants of classical philosophy was a certain neo-Kantianism, whose last word was the eternally unknowable thing-in-itself, that is, the bit of Kant that least merited preservation. The final result was the incoherence and confusion of theoretical thought now prevalent.

"One can scarcely pick up a theoretical book on natural science without getting the impression that natural scientists themselves feel how much they are dominated by this incoherence and confusion, and that the so-called philosophy now current offers them absolutely no way out. And here there really is no other way out, no possibility of achieving clarity, than by a return, in one form or another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking."

The claim that Engels is making for dialectics is that it, and only it, can embrace the entirety of human thought through history, as well as the entirety of human understanding in the present. Because of dialectics, because of Aristotle, [Hegel](#),

Marx and Engels, all of this becomes possible and at the same time, therefore, unavoidable.

“Classical” philosophy for Engels mainly referred to the work of [Immanuel Kant](#) (1724-1804) and GWF Hegel (1770-1831). Engels and Marx were Hegelians, but not “Old-Hegelians”. This explains why Engels seems to reject Hegel, or to want to correct Hegel, and stand Hegel on his feet where before he was standing on his head; and yet, Engels praises dialectic above all, and the historic reintroduction of dialectical thinking is owed entirely to Hegel, which Engels knows very well, and acknowledges.

The Hegelian recognition of unity in human history, experience, and understanding is simultaneously a great breakthrough and pillar of our age, but is also a contested, and to some extent unabsorbed idea. It would make racism impossible, for example; yet racism survives. There remain opposing schools of philosophy, and the irrational, anti-human and reactionary system called “post-modernism” has in recent decades become the mental currency of Imperialism.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [On Dialectics, 1878, Engels](#).**
-



[Frederick Engels, 1820 - 1895](#)

Philosophers

Johannesburg, 2004

The Communist University started in June, 2003, more than eleven years ago. The main text linked below was prepared for the CU when it was six months old (it has since been re-written, so that it is shorter). It is an attempt to walk through the history of philosophy using the problematic of individual-versus-society as the binding dialectical theme. As well as a chronicle of philosophical thought, it includes a diagram that traces the present-day contending schools back to a split that took place around where Marx and Engels come into the picture, in the early 1840s. That great parting of the ways was marked by a specific set of circumstances, which is worth describing and referencing.

Berlin, 1841

Hegel died in November, 1831, when Karl Marx was 13 and Frederick Engels 11. Ten years later, Marx graduated from the University of Berlin and was awarded a doctorate of philosophy by the University of Jena, shortly before his 24th birthday. Also in 1841, Engels was sent to Berlin to spend a year with the Artillery Guards. There is no record of Marx and Engels meeting in Berlin at this time. Their first recorded meeting was in Cologne, in November, 1842. Marx was by then editing a magazine called the *Rheinische Zeitung* (it was his first job) while Engels was on his way back to Manchester to recommence working in his father's company. The two teamed up permanently in Paris two years later, in 1844.

In the same year of 1841, **Ludwig Feuerbach** published his “Essence of Christianity” of which Engels later said: “...*the spell was broken; the "system" was exploded and cast aside ... one must have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general.*” During the next part, we will look at the book [Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of German Classical Philosophy](#), which Engels wrote forty-five years later, in 1886, about the effect of Feuerbach’s intervention.

Meanwhile along came **F W J Schelling**, who had been a colleague and rival of Hegel’s, and had struggled in the great man’s shade. In 1841, at the age of 66, Schelling was suddenly made a Prussian privy councillor and member of the Berlin Academy, with a political instruction to give lectures at the university against Hegel, so as to demolish Hegel’s reputation, ten years after Hegel’s death.

Hegel’s philosophy had long been the pride of the Prussian establishment, but it had turned out to be potential weapon in the hands of the proletarian class then growing with the spread of capitalism in Germany. In Berlin, philosophical uproar had begun, involving the “Young Hegelians”, Feuerbach, Marx, Engels and others. The revolutions of 1848 were only a few years away.

Schelling was appointed with an instruction to debunk Hegel. His lectures attracted a sensationally distinguished audience, which included Engels, who said: “*It will be our business to follow the course of his [Schelling's] thinking and to shield the great man's [Hegel's] grave from abuse. We are not afraid to fight.*” Others present included the Russian anarchist **Mikhail Bakunin**, the Danish theologian **Søren Kierkegaard**, and the great Swiss humanist historian of the Renaissance, **Jacob Burckhardt**.

A good account by Andy Blunden of this “world-historic” philosophical event can be [found here on MIA](#).

In 1842, Engels published a work known as “[Anti-Schelling](#)”, which includes in its Chapter 5 the following classically dialectical line: “*Only that freedom is genuine which contains necessity...*”

Engels was 21 when he started writing “Anti-Schelling”. In contrast to Doctor Karl Marx, Engels was at that stage a military cadet who had never been to university (and never did go). Yet he was bold enough to challenge the official state philosopher, in print. The image above is of Engels in 1841, in his military uniform.

In terms of my rough chronology of philosophers in today’s text, this was the situation following Hume, Rousseau and Kant, and when Marx and Engels came in. Seven years prior to the revolutions of 1848, where the proletariat appears for the

first time as a crucial revolutionary actor and subject of history, this was the moment when philosophy split into its subsequent fragments, of which the contending philosophical schools of today are the direct successors.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Philosophers, 2004, Tweedie.](#)
-

Philosophy and Religion, Part 2b



[Baruch Spinoza, 1632 - 1677](#)

Renaissance and Enlightenment

The longer part of today's attached and linked text, on Alberti and Spinoza, written by Anthony Blunt, describes the [Italian Renaissance](#) (= "*rebirth*") through the life and work of [Leon Battista Alberti](#) (1404-1472). The Renaissance is significant as an intermediate high point of humanism between the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and the modern, Marxist world. The Renaissance followed the European "Dark Ages" and "Middle Ages". The Renaissance thinkers drew upon Arab, Indian and Chinese culture as well as on that of the Ancients who had slept for a thousand years beneath their Italian feet. This piece of writing can also help to show how the unity of historical thought that Hegel later theorised had in practice been realised.

The Italian Renaissance, based on reason and the understanding that humans can and do by themselves develop human culture; and that human culture is not limited by the extent of the knowledge of the ancients, or by any other interior limitation.

The Italian Renaissance at its peak represents a pure form of humanism – the best-developed in history up to that time.

The Italian Renaissance was later overcome by its own internal reactionary forces (e.g. see the last paragraph of Blunt's account), but humanism did not then sleep for as long as it had slept after the fall of the Roman Empire. It quickly rose again in Northern Europe, led in particular by the work of [Baruch Spinoza](#) (1632-1637) among others, in a movement known as [The Enlightenment](#), which we may regard as continuing up to the time of Hegel, and therefore up to the dawn of Marxism. A short piece of Spinoza's writing is given at the end of the Anthony Blunt document.

The following quotation is from a [Spinoza page on MIA](#). It shows how Spinoza's thought prepares the way for Engels' thought:

"That thing is said to be FREE (libera) which exists by the mere necessity of its own nature and is determined to act by itself alone. That thing is said to be NECESSARY (necessaria), or rather COMPELLED (coacta), which is determined by something else to exist and act in a certain fixed and determinate way."

These writings show the development of understanding of the dialectic of Freedom and Necessity, and the closely-related, parallel dialectic of Subject and Object. They can help one to understand the philosophical ground upon which Marx and Engels stood. For further reading on Spinoza, see the Soviet philosopher [Evald Ilyenkov's essay on Spinoza](#) on MIA, where Ilyenkov remarks, and then quotes Hegel, as follows:

"...he was probably the only one of the great thinkers of the pre-Marxian era who knew how to unite brilliant models of acutely dialectical thought with a consistently held materialist principle (rigorously applied throughout his system) of understanding thought and its relations to the external world lying in the space outside the human head.

"The influence of Spinoza's ideas on the subsequent development of dialectical thought can hardly be exaggerated. 'It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy.' [[Lectures on the History of Philosophy](#), Hegel]

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Alberti and Spinoza compilation, Blunt, Spinoza](#).



[Charles Fourier, 1772 - 1837](#)

Utopia and Science

In this, the last of this week's part of the course on Philosophy and Religion, we link once again to Engels' "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific" (attached, in three parts). This is a short text extracted by Engels from his larger work, "Anti-Dühring", and it helps us to place thought in a historical framework. For example, dealing with the period subsequent to the Renaissance and prior to the French Revolution that is often referred to as "The Enlightenment", Engels writes:

"We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that this eternal Right found its realization in bourgeois justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contrat Social [Social Contract] of Rousseau, came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the 18th century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."

Here Engels describes the limitation imposed upon the human Subject by the objective circumstances, and also the possibility of transcending such limitations. This is humanism. Humanism says that humans build humanity within the given material world and history.

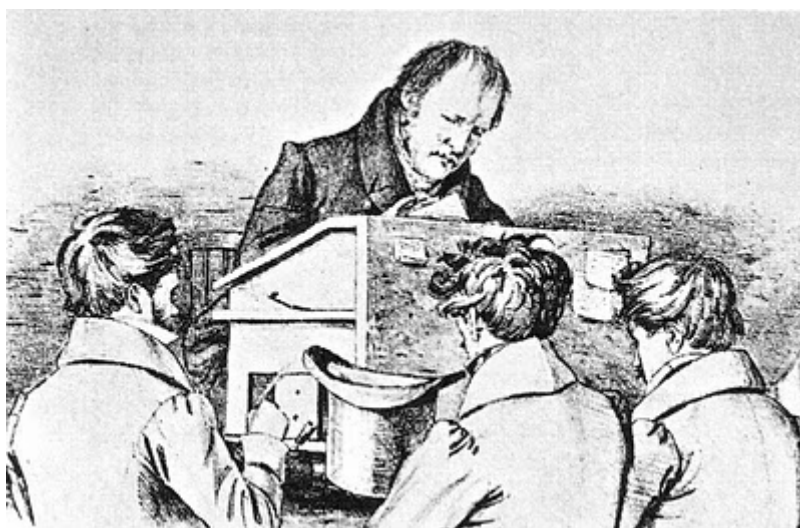
Nowhere does Engels say that humanity is an accidental combination of atoms and molecules.

Yet, by sometimes chastising the great Hegel with the same kind of roughness as he treated the nonentity Dühring, Engels sowed the seeds of others' subsequent and greater errors. Such an error came about when the dichotomy of "idealism and materialism" was elevated to a master-narrative of philosophy, which it is not. Humanity is not reducible to matter.

As great as he was, communists have in practice relied too heavily upon Engels to teach them philosophy. As a result they have magnified Engels' otherwise unremarkable mistakes to monstrous proportions. The main one of these is the denigration of "idealism" and the perverse worship of "materialism". Whereas it is the free-willing human Subject which was at the centre of Marx's work, and which must be at the centre of any communist's work.

The image is of [Charles Fourier](#) (1772-1837), maybe the greatest of the utopian socialists, and also the inventor of the word "feminism". The utopian socialists were prominent after the Great French Revolution that started in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July of that year. Marx and Engels wrote of them in the third part of [Chapter 3 of the 1848 Communist Manifesto](#), called "Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism".

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, 1880, Engels](#).
-



[G W F Hegel 1770 - 1831](#)

Hegel

[George William Frederick Hegel](#) (1770-1831) [Image: Hegel with his students] was not just somebody whose theories were surpassed by those of Marx and Engels, nor was he merely a John the Baptist to Karl Marx's Christ. Hegel was an original, with an indelible part in the development of human thought, that is inseparable from Marx's contribution.

Engels in his short "[Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 1 - Hegel](#)" (linked below) writes that the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 were each preceded by uproar in the field of philosophy; but there were differences.

Whereas the French philosophers had been banned and proscribed, Hegel had advanced in "*a triumphant procession which lasted for decades*" at times with "*the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of state*". Even in the decade following Hegel's death, until the lectures of Schelling in 1841 which Engels (aged 21) attended, "*'Hegelianism' reigned most exclusively.*" This was the ground in which Marxism grew, and this is what Engels is describing in the main linked text.

One of our CU correspondents has written to say that it is unfair to lay the blame for "mechanical materialism" at Engels' door. This is true, but the unfairness does not arise from prejudice. It arises because of Engels' ambiguous semi-filial relationship with Hegel, which causes Engels to defend Hegel, while at the same time strongly repudiating some aspects of Hegel's work.

For us who are far less familiar with Hegel than were Engels and his contemporaries, the simultaneous defence and attack can appear self-contradictory, or worse. Stripped from the tactical context, some of Engels' words may appear to lend support to absolute "mechanical materialism".

Circumstances, and tactics responding to circumstances, played a part. Engels says: *"At that time politics was a very thorny field, and hence the main fight came to be directed against religion; this fight, particularly since 1840, was indirectly also political."*

This proxy role played in politics by religion in 1840s Germany is the reason for the apparent elevation of the dichotomy of idealism and materialism, which later writers, out of context, have somehow tended to treat like a sort of "Rosetta Stone" of Marxism, as if the ideal/material dichotomy explains everything, when by itself it explains nothing.

The question of what, if anything, was really discarded by Marx and Engels from Hegel is one we may look at again later in this series. Lenin wrote: *"It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"*

Clearly, Lenin did not think of Hegel as being redundant, or superseded.

Evidence of Engels' and Marx's debt to Hegel is found in the works themselves, which are saturated with Hegelian method, as Ilyenkov points out [in his work on Capital](#).

A good place to start learning about Hegel is Andy Blunden's [Getting to know Hegel](#), which is in turn part of Andy's great resource called [Hegel by Hypertext](#).

But first, the short Part 1 of Hegel's Ludwig Feuerbach explains a lot.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 1 - Hegel, 1886, Engels](#).
-



[Frederick Engels, 1820 - 1895](#)

Freedom and Necessity

The attached item, also linked below, which is from Anti-Dühring, suffers from the occasional problem of that work: that it gives rather too much attention to Herr Dühring. The relevant part is mainly on page 5, which begins:

"Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the insight into necessity (die Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit).

"Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood [begriffen]."

"Freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends."

Freedom is the recognition of necessity. The Subject knows the Object, and is made free. This is the discovery of freedom in the Fundamental Question of Philosophy (i.e. the relation of mind to matter), and it is the only answer that we need from that Question. Preoccupation with the alleged primacy of the material over the human is a scholastic dispute that has no practical use.

Marx by Engels

Let us jump forward now to the third item in this part (we will return to it again in the next instalment), which is Engels' "Ludwig Feuerbach" in its fourth and final section, mainly dealing with Engels' friend Karl Marx, who had died three years prior to the publication of this work of Engels'.

Says Engels:

"Out of the dissolution of the Hegelian school, however, there developed still another tendency, the only one which has borne real fruit. And this tendency is essentially connected with the name of Marx (1).

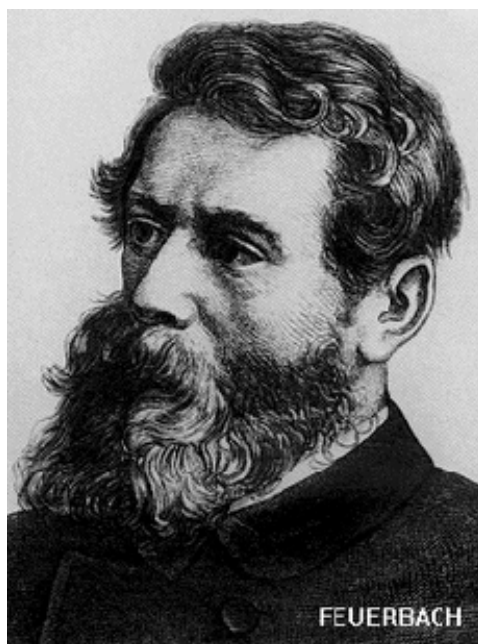
"The separation from Hegelian philosophy was here also the result of a return to the materialist standpoint. That means it was resolved to comprehend the real world — nature and history — just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealist crotchets. It was decided mercilessly to sacrifice every idealist fancy which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic interconnection. And materialism means nothing more than this."

Yes, materialism was crucial to Marx's theories. Materialism gazed mercilessly at the objective universe from the point of view of the free individual human being. But this did not amount to an elevation of the material universe to the status of a "prime mover" God, progenitor of life and breather of spirit into man. Materialism means nothing more than reality, as opposed to fantasy; reality, as looked upon mercilessly by the human Subject.

The remainder of Part 4 of "Ludwig Feuerbach" develops into one of those grand sweeping overviews of which both Engels and Marx were capable. In this case science, philosophy and class politics are interwoven in an undoubtedly dialectical way.

There is also a typically self-deprecating footnote by Engels about Karl Marx and their relationship, but here Engels may be too close to the action to be able to make a correct judgement. The full truth is surely not contained in these few words of his. The political contribution of any comrade, in total, is an unknowable quantity. Comparisons between one comrade and another are generally odious. Engels' contribution is undoubted, and his contribution to this CU topic of "Philosophy, Religion, and Revolution" and of Hegel in particular is proportionately greater than any other, because he was involved with it from the early 1840s, before he met Marx, and because he took care to write about it after Marx passed away.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, Anti-Dühring, Chapter 11, Freedom and Necessity, 1877](#).



[Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804 - 1872](#)

Ludwig Feuerbach

Frederick Engels' "[Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy](#)" was written when he was 66 years old, three years after the death of his close comrade Karl Marx. It is a retrospective assessment in four short, powerful parts, for publication in a magazine called *Die Neue Zeit*. We considered the first part, headed "Hegel", in a previous post in this CU series on "Philosophy and Religion". To save time, we skip the parts headed "[Materialism](#)" and "[Feuerbach](#)", though they are good and useful. The concluding and summarising part of "Ludwig Feuerbach" is headed "Marx" (attached; download linked below).

Necessity of struggle in philosophy

Let us now look at the question of philosophy's relation to revolution.

In "Ludwig Feuerbach", Engels is saying that prior to each great revolution of the past there had been a period of catastrophic ferment in philosophy. He comes close to saying that a conscious, public break-up of the pre-existing philosophy is a necessary condition for revolution. At any rate, this was historically the case in France prior to the Great French Revolution, and in Germany prior to the upheavals of 1848 that established the modern world's politics of Bourgeois, Proletarians and Communists.

Engels is saying that it was the thorough breaking-up of the philosophical soil that allowed these two great revolutions to put down permanent roots.

Later on in our CU series on Philosophy and Religion we will read an argument that says that in the case of the Great October proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917, the philosophical ground had not been sufficiently prepared, and that is why the Russian revolution developed the way it did, and why the USSR eventually collapsed in the way that it did, at the end of the 1980s, just prior to South Africa's democratic breakthrough.

This in turn raises the question of whether it will be possible to have any further revolutionary advance in South Africa, or anywhere else, let alone any final and permanent revolution, without a thorough breaking-up of the philosophical ground upon which we stand today, ground which has hardly been disturbed since the mid-19th century.

Assuming that we agree that this could be the case, then we would need to ask, first, how to take stock of the received philosophical legacy, including its revolutionary component? And then, having discovered and delineated the frontier from which we will have to depart, to make out a line of march and begin a campaign. We will attempt to do this as the series develops, up to its tenth part.

For now, let us begin to draft a provisional outline of the principal sources of philosophy that would form part of such an assessment, plan and campaign. It could include the following, taken in chronological order:

1. The historical legacy in philosophy, e.g. [Aristotle](#), Alberti, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza
2. Hegel's works, especially "Logic" and the "Philosophy of Right"
3. Explicitly philosophical unpublished and published writings of Marx and Engels in the 1840s, during the multiple struggles of the "Old Hegelians", "Young Hegelians", Schelling, Feuerbach, Stirner, Bauer, Proudhon *et cetera*
4. The remainder of Marx's work, which, though not directly philosophical, contains constant implicit and tacit philosophical determinations
5. Engels' late work on philosophy including "Anti-Dühring", "Ludwig Feuerbach", and certain other short writings
6. Lenin's philosophical grounding, especially as it comes out in "[The State and Revolution](#)"

7. Critical reflections on the philosophy contained in the revolutionary “classics”, by writers such as Christopher Caudwell, Evald Ilyenkov, Cyril Smith and James Heartfield
8. Forward-looking revolutionary philosophy that corresponds with developments in science, taking for an example the late South African revolutionary Ron Press’s “New Tools for Marxists”

To all of this we will have to add a sensitive and wide-ranging assessment of the *de facto* philosophy or world-outlook of our South African society today, in its abstract parts and in its concrete whole. This will be in the nature of active research, because as we find, so we will have to engage.

Religious Struggle Not Now So Necessary

Religion was historically crucial in the case of the 1848 revolutions, as Engels shows. Religion had become the vehicle or the proxy whereby the revolutionary elements of the bourgeoisie expressed themselves, and articulated their struggles intellectually, even though these struggles had a material basis and a basis in class struggle.

In the linked extract from his “Ludwig Feuerbach” Engels describes the movement in religion in marvellous, masterful, sweeping paragraphs. Please, read it, comrades. Nothing I say can improve it, and it does not need shortening because it is already short, tight, concentrated and clear.

It is not the case that religion necessarily plays the same role today in South Africa, as it did then in Germany. On the contrary, religious formations are a strong part of the National Democratic Revolution. The liberation theologians are our allies.

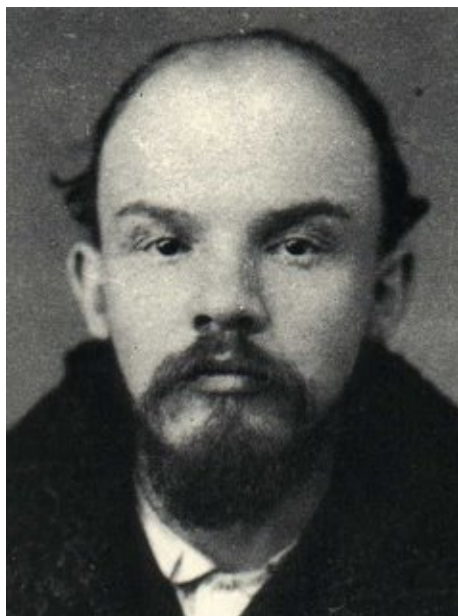
Worldwide, and as a rule, religion has long since reconciled itself with science such as the discoveries of Charles Darwin, for example, which had to do with the evolution of species, including humans. “Materialism” has won, in that sense. Atheism was never an issue for Marx and hardly an issue for Marxists in general, and Feuerbach was religious, even if materialist. There are no texts to be found among the Marxist “classics” that preach atheism as such.

Thus, though the moment when Ludwig Feuerbach (see his image, above) published his book “[Essence of Christianity](#)” in 1841 was for Engels a defining one, yet the place of religion today is not the same as was the place of religion then, and so Feuerbach’s “materialism” does not now have the force or the purpose that it had, for a short time, in Engels’ youth. Feuerbach and his “materialism” had their

moment, and it was a short moment. What matters now is freedom, agency, and the ability to decide. What matters is: *Power, to the People!*

In 1843 Karl Marx wrote: *“For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism.”* Completed, indeed; and so it is with us today. We may thus conclude that we have no business making war on religion; and we will come back to this point soon, with Lenin.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 4, Marx, 1886](#).
-



[V I Lenin, 1870 – 1924](#)

Lenin

The philosopher [Helena Sheehan](#) records that [Christopher Caudwell](#), whose work we will look at later on in this series, used a quote from Lenin that says:

"Communism becomes a mere empty phrase, a mere facade, and the communist a mere bluffer, if he has not worked over in his consciousness the whole inheritance of human knowledge."

Whether this quotation is genuine or not, Lenin certainly did take philosophy seriously, and worked at it hard. Through 1908 and into 1909 he wrote and then published an entire book on philosophy called [Materialism and Empirio-Criticism](#). The book is belligerently partisan for materialism as against idealism, in the way that Lenin saw such things at the time.

"Anyone in the least acquainted with philosophical literature must know that scarcely a single contemporary professor of philosophy (or of theology) can be found who is not directly or indirectly engaged in refuting materialism," says Lenin about his bourgeois opponents (*"in lieu of an Introduction"*).

Vladimir Ilyich also left his notebook on philosophy, "[Conspectus of Hegel's book 'The Science of Logic'](#)", dated 1914, in which, among other things he, Lenin, wrote:

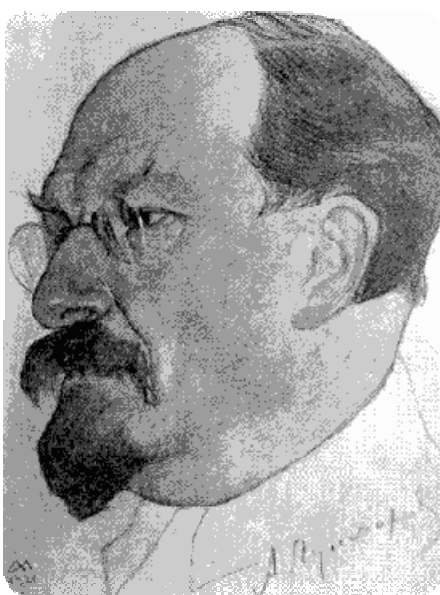
"It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later, none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"

These stances of Lenin's are not exactly compatible with each other. Hegel, after all, had always been denounced, including by Lenin, as an "idealist".

Lenin was still deliberately studying philosophy up until the tumultuous events that followed the outbreak of the Imperialist World War in mid-1914, the resulting split in the communist movement, the two Russian Revolutions of 1917, and the enormous consequences that followed all of these events, when Lenin was required to give a lead in almost every sphere of life. We will ask whether Lenin's philosophical preparations for revolution, and those of his peers, were sufficient; we may conclude that they were not.

We are also looking at religion, so what we will use for discussion in the first place is a text concerning Lenin's approach to religion. Among the "classics" it is Lenin who provided explicit and direct prescriptions as to how practical, organising, educating and mobilising communists should deal with the question of religion. Whether he does so in a completely satisfactory way, or not, can be part of the discussion.

Lenin cannot be accused of being sympathetic to religion, as Karl Marx could be, for example, on the strength of the [Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#); while Engels appears to have left the topic alone. Lenin's feelings about religion can be judged from a note in "[Materialism and Empirio-Criticism](#)" where Lenin writes *"However good your intentions may be, Comrade Lunacharsky, it is not a smile, but disgust your flirtation with religion provokes."*



[Anatoly Lunacharsky, 1875 - 1933](#)

Altogether, the amount of writing by Marx, Engels and Lenin on the subject of religion is remarkably little. It may amount to as little as a thousandth of one per cent of what they wrote altogether.

This is not surprising considering that communism is not about religion and is not at war with religion or at war with God. Communists are interested in individual people and in humanity generally. It remains a fact that in most countries, including South Africa, the majority of people, including workers, are, if not always strictly religious, brought up within the fold of religion from one generation to another. So even if the communist theoretical legacy around the question of religion is very small, yet it is important. A theory of how to deal with religion will be helpful to communist cadres today.

Lenin's "Attitude of Worker's Party to Religion" (linked below) attacks the question. Let us quarrel with Lenin, for once in our lives.

He writes: *"It is the absolute duty of Social-Democrats to make a public statement of their attitude towards religion."* Is it? Why is it?

Lenin writes: *"The philosophical basis of Marxism, as Marx and Engels repeatedly declared, is dialectical materialism... a materialism which is absolutely atheistic and positively hostile to all religion."*

In truth, neither Marx nor Engels ever used the phrase "dialectical materialism", as we will show later on in this series. Nor is our materialism the opposite of religion, in the way that Lenin puts it here. Ours is only to say that the counterpart to the human Subject is the real, objective universe. This is not an anti-religious statement, or an anti-religious materialism. It is humanism, and humanism is not necessarily atheism.

"Religion is the opium of the people—this dictum by Marx is the corner-stone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion," writes Lenin, lending his authority to a terrible mistake that has since been repeated millions of times. Marx's point was that religion was a relief to the poor people who could not afford opium, and that religion was also "the heart of a heartless world" and the "sigh of the oppressed creature".

But Lenin, in this rather badly-constructed statement, appears more concerned to establish his atheistic credentials than to push his denunciations of religion to a conclusion, because he soon starts back-tracking. He recalls various examples of bourgeois persecution of religion, disapprovingly. He manages to say at the same time that the socialist revolutionaries are not tactical about religion, but also to say

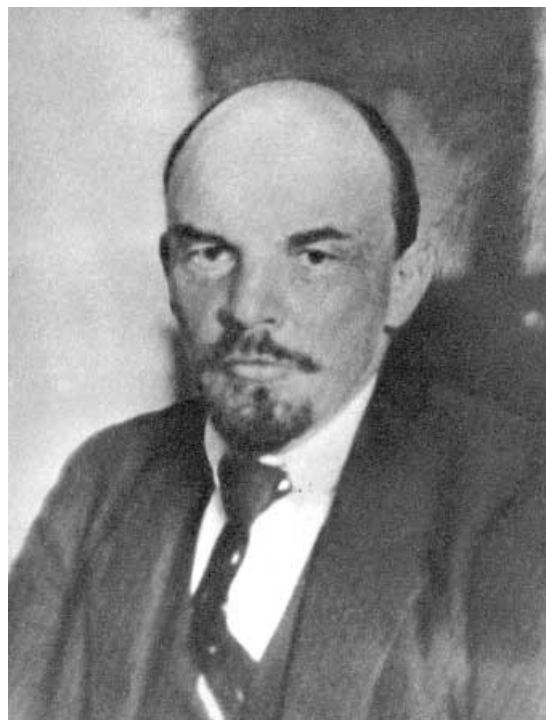
that they subordinate the question of religion to more crucial necessities (i.e. they are tactical). So he appears to contradict himself in this regard, too.

Then, towards the end, Lenin managed to praise the Duma deputy (parliamentary representative) Surkov, who had made a speech denouncing religion as the opium of the masses. Really, this pamphlet looks like damage control or spin-doctoring by Lenin. It looks like Comrade Surkov had got into a controversy and needed some public backing.

The first image above is of Lenin in 1896, aged 26. The second image is of [Anatoly Lunacharsky](#), People's Commissar of Education in Lenin's first Soviet government.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Attitude of Worker's Party to Religion, 1900, Lenin](#).

Philosophy and Religion, Part 4a



[V I Lenin, 1870 – 1924](#)

Three Sources and Component Parts

Lenin's "[The 3 Sources and 3 Component Parts of Marxism](#)" (attached; download linked below) is a favourite because it is very concise - only four pages long - and very illuminating.

But it also contains mistakes, and it encourages mistakes.

For example, Lenin writes: “... *there is nothing resembling "sectarianism" in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose away from the highroad of development of world civilisation.*” Which is correct.

But Lenin immediately follows with: “*The Marxian doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is complete and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world conception*” - in other words, he says, it is fixed, hidebound and petrified.

This pair of sentences constitutes a self-contradiction by Lenin. What happened to the “highroad of development of world civilisation” in between the two statements? Did it come to a dead end (i.e. was it “completed”)?

“*The philosophy of Marxism is materialism,*” writes Lenin, and not “*old and rotten idealism.*” This is philosophy reduced to catechism, or of pat answers to “Frequently Asked Questions”. It is not much use, not even as propaganda. It is so much simplified as to be dangerous.

Actually, Marx himself opposed the concept of a “doctrine” that would be “omnipotent because true”, or “complete”. Marx’s work was not complete in his lifetime, and if he had been blessed with two lifetimes, he would surely have left, not less, but more like double the amount of revolutionary work-in-progress. The more work Marx did, the larger was the frontier that he opened up.

Lenin writes: “*Where the bourgeois economists saw a relation of things (the exchange of one commodity for another), Marx revealed a relation of men.*” This is true. Marx was concerned with the men, more than with the things. This is why it is necessary to be careful with the word “materialism”.

Lenin writes: “*The doctrine of surplus value is the cornerstone of Marx's economic theory.*” This is only half true. Surplus Value is not merely the cornerstone of some discrete part of Marxism called “economic theory”. It is much more than that. The sale of Labour-Power to a capitalist at the point of production, and the subsequent expropriation of the entire product of the worker’s labour by the capitalist, is the source of Surplus Value. It is also the source of class differentiation and class conflict. It is the reason for the necessity of the development of a collective popular Subject of History around the working-class cause.

In short, it is good to examine the abstract parts of any phenomenon, including “Marxism”, but only if one is to proceed to a synthesis, or concretisation of these

parts into a dynamically-comprehended whole. That is how dialectics works. That is how an examination of the sources and component parts of Marxism should be concluded, but in this instance Lenin does not quite succeed in doing so. Instead, he leaves the parts as parts. He leaves us with a list of ingredients, but not the finished cake.

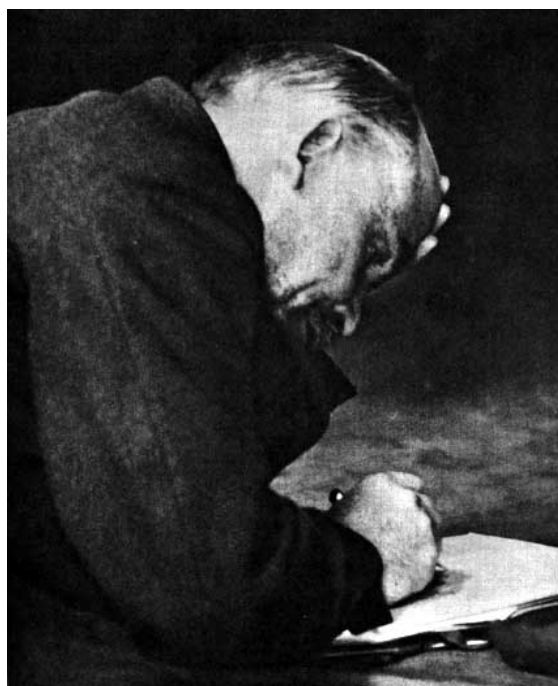
Lenin writes: *“While increasing the dependence of the workers on capital, the capitalist system creates the great power of united labour.”*

Capitalism does create a working class, and organises it as a labour-force, but it does not unite it politically. This, like the previous examples, shows the danger of over-simplification. Lenin was no doubt writing for workers, and brevity was his aim, and he possessed an extraordinary ability to compress difficult ideas into a few, clear words. Yet even Great Lenin, the most famous advocate of determined, deliberate political organisation, including vanguard organisation of professional revolution (e.g. in [“What is to be Done?”](#)) could be tempted to undermine himself in the over-pursuit of simplification.

Lenin recovers this particular matter of organisation in the document’s concluding paragraph, where he even mentions South Africa (this was in 1913):

“Independent organisations of the proletariat are multiplying all over the world, from America to Japan and from Sweden to South Africa. The proletariat is becoming enlightened and educated by waging its class struggle; it is ridding itself of the prejudices of bourgeois society; it is rallying its ranks ever more closely and is learning to gauge the measure of its successes; it is steeling its forces and is growing irresistibly.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [3 Sources and 3 Component Parts of Marxism, 1913, Lenin](#).
-



[V I Lenin, 1870 – 1924](#)

Lenin's Encyclopaedia entry on Marx

The attached item today is Lenin's "Biographical Sketch and Exposition" of Karl Marx, written and first published as an encyclopaedia entry. It has all the hallmarks of Lenin's precision of style, being concise and concrete, but it also has traces of the worst side of Lenin's didacticism, almost to the point of dogma. "*Marxism is the system of Marx's views and teachings,*" writes Lenin, cheerfully beginning a section headed "The Marxist Doctrine". The next section is called "Marx's Economic Doctrine".

But Marx did not write economics, and he didn't write "doctrine" of any kind.

We will be dealing with such un-Marx-like formulations as "Marx's Economic Doctrine" in later parts of this course.

Lenin was the greatest practical revolutionist in history, to date, but he was not the greatest philosopher. Karl Marx was the greatest philosopher, to date, and Marx stood on the shoulders of Hegel.

Lenin was one of hundreds of millions of followers of Marx. All of them have struggled to understand Marx. Lenin wrote, also in 1914:

“It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!”

Lenin's long book on philosophy is called [“Materialism and Empirio-Criticism”](#) (1909).

The main downloadable document is an outstanding summary of Karl Marx's life and work. A large portion of it is about philosophy. Do not be put off by any reservations that may have been expressed above. This text is a “must read”, in any case, as well as being a significant part of this course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Karl Marx, Biographical Sketch and Exposition, 1914, Lenin.](#)
-

Course: Philosophy and Religion

18001, Philosophy and Religion, Introductions Booklet 1 of 2

9590 words